

# THE SPIRIT OF SPARTA OR THE TASTE OF XENOPHON

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*I have not forgotten Xenophon; he has his  
proper place among the philosophers.*

-- Quint. 10.1.75-6

*Xenophon non excidit mihi, sed  
inter philosophos reddendus est.*

—Quintilian

XENOPHON'S treatise *Constitution of the Lacedemonians* appears to be devoted to praise of the Spartan constitution, or, which amounts to the same thing,<sup>1</sup> of the Spartan mode of life. A superficial reading gives the impression that his admiration of Sparta is unreserved. One is therefore all the more surprised to find him declaring quite abruptly, toward the end of the treatise, that contemporary Sparta suffers from very grave defects. Yet in all but the fourteenth of the fifteen chapters he praises contemporary Sparta about as much as the Sparta of old, and he seems to speak quite indiscriminately of what the Spartan legislator Lycurgus had enacted in the remote past and of what the Spartans were actually doing in his time. That is to say the treatise as a whole hides the censure, inserted toward the end, of contemporary Sparta. In order to hide that censure still more Xenophon uses a strange device: he does not put it right at the end, which would be its proper place<sup>2</sup> but where it would strike the eyes, but sandwiches it in somewhere in the last section of the treatise.

But why does he hide his censure of contemporary Sparta so ineptly? Could he not have concealed it much more effectively by simply omitting it? This of course is true; but the mere omission would have had a great disadvantage: nobody could then see that Xenophon was not blind to the serious defects of the Sparta of his time; and any sensible reader who had those defects before him would have considered the author a biased fool or partisan or a

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1295 b 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the "epilogue" of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*.

weakling corrupted by gifts, and he would not have taken at all seriously the author's praise of Lycurgus' legislation. Xenophon was therefore compelled to pronounce his censure of contemporary Sparta in order not to compromise his praise of the old Sparta. Now if he had put that censure at the end of the treatise he would have spoiled the total effect of a work which is devoted not to blaming, but to praising.<sup>1</sup>

This fails, however, to dispose of the objection that the way in which Xenophon half hides his censure of contemporary Sparta is very clumsy, and that, considering his great literary gifts, any hypothesis is preferable to the assumption that he used a literary device awkwardly. To that objection, which is sound as far as it is based on observation of Xenophon's exceptional talents, we answer that if in a given case he apparently happens to do a bad job as a writer, or as a thinker, he actually does it deliberately and for very good reasons. As far as the objection alludes to certain devices of higher criticism, we reply that methods of that kind should not be applied before the author's intentions have been truly understood. This is to say first that, by hiding his censure of contemporary Sparta clumsily, Xenophon gives us to understand that he hides certain much more important views of his in an extremely able manner; and second, that the duty of the interpreter is not to attempt to be wiser than Xenophon, but to exert all his powers of understanding and imagination in order to make some progress toward wisdom by taking Xenophon as his guide.

## I

The first chapter of the treatise appears to be devoted to praise of Lycurgus' laws concerning procreation of children. Xenophon points out two important differences between the way in which the other Greeks bring up their future mothers and Lycurgus' provisions; but whereas he explains the second of these differences with perfect clarity, he only touches upon the first. All he says regarding it is: "The others feed the girls who are destined to bear

<sup>1</sup> See G. Prinz, *De Xenophontis Cyri institutione* (Göttingen 1911) p. 74.

children, and who are supposed to be well educated, on both the most moderate quantity of vegetable food which is practicable, and on the smallest quantity of meat which is possible; as regards wine, they either keep the girls from it altogether or let them consume it only if it is diluted with water."<sup>1</sup> He omits, then, any mention of what Lycurgus had enacted concerning the food and drink of girls; or rather he does not tell us by an explicit statement, but gives us all the information necessary between the lines, i.e. by the way in which he arranges the whole argument. For the statement quoted belongs to a context which is destined to set forth the differences between, and opposition of, the practices of other Greek cities and the practices established by Lycurgus;<sup>2</sup> it is, therefore, simply an introduction to a much more important statement, suppressed by Xenophon, that the eating and drinking habits of Spartan girls were different from and opposed to those of other Greek girls. Thus Xenophon gives us to understand that Lycurgus allowed the Spartan girls ample food and undiluted wine. Allowing them ample food appears to be a measure most conducive to the procreation of strong offspring, the purpose of his legislation which Xenophon is discussing in the context under consideration. Why, then, does he not state explicitly what Lycurgus had enacted with regard to the food of girls? The riddle is solved by the fact that "ample food" is closely connected in Xenophon's argument with "undiluted wine." For although there is good reason for giving young women ample food, allowing them undiluted Greek wine may be dangerous. We know from easily accessible sources that Spartan girls and women were famous for their laxity of manners in general, and especially in matters of sex;<sup>3</sup> and we know the close connection between Venus and Bacchus. Because of the famous licentiousness of Spartan women Xenophon says nothing of the quantity and quality of food and drink which Spartan girls con-

<sup>1</sup> *Constitution of the Lacedemonians*, I, 3.

<sup>2</sup> I, 3-4. Cf. I, 2, 5 and 10.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 637 c 1-2 (cf. e 1-3) and 780 d 9 ff. Cf. also *Republic*, 548 a-b, 549 c-e and 550 d 12; Aristotle, *Politics*, 1269 b 9-12 and 1270 a 7-9; Euripides, *Andromache*, vv. 595-601.

sumed, a wise omission in a treatise devoted to the praise of Sparta. But would it not have been wiser still if he had not even mentioned the opposed practices of other Greek cities? If we are not to assume that he was a fool who was unable to realize an obvious implication of his own statements, or that he was a worse writer than the most hurried reporter could possibly be, we must believe that he did it as a faint indication of the laxity of Spartan women.

This conclusion is confirmed by the whole argument of the first chapter and, indeed, of the whole treatise. Immediately after alluding to the diet of the Spartan girls Xenophon mentions their physical exercises. In that context he pointedly speaks of the Spartan "females."<sup>1</sup> By using that expression he refers, I assume, to the fact that Spartan women were left to their animal natures much more than were Spartan men, because they were much less disciplined. Only education<sup>2</sup> could have made Spartan women continent and thus have acted as an antidote against "ample food and undiluted wine." Yet in the whole treatise Xenophon does not say a single explicit word about education, other than physical, of Spartan women,<sup>3</sup> whereas he emphasizes the fact that Spartan education made the Spartan men continent, and the related fact that as a con-

<sup>1</sup> He does this by speaking first of "the male and female tribe" and by then contrasting "the men" with "the females" (I, 4).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. III, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Notice the mention of education of girls other than Spartan in I, 3. Xenophon seems to speak of the education of Spartan girls in the second chapter, which is devoted to the education of children. There he uses only once the unambiguous word "sons"—at the beginning of the chapter, where he is not yet speaking of Spartan education but of education as practiced in other Greek cities. He immediately afterwards replaces "sons" by the ambiguous word "children," and uses it throughout the chapter. In II, 5, he speaks of the extremely frugal food of Spartan "male" children; this remark shows again that the food of Spartan "female" children was not frugal. In II, 11, (I am following the readings of the MSS) he informs us that if no older man were available to supervise the children the smartest of the "males" had to take command; this implies that Spartan boys and girls had their physical exercises together. (The bad consequences of the Spartan type of coeducation for the chastity of women were emphasized by Euripides, *loc. cit.*) This conclusion is not contradicted but rather confirmed by I, 4, where Xenophon speaks of rival contests among women as distinguished from contests among men; for rival contests of adults are one thing, and physical exercises of children are another. Compare J. S. Watson's translation of Xenophon's *Minor Works* (London 1891) p. 206, note 3.

sequence of Lycurgus' legislation "it has become manifest that the male tribe is stronger than those of female nature even as regards modesty."<sup>1</sup> Xenophon says nothing of the women's moral education or of their sense of shame for the same reason that he says nothing of their diet.

For it was not modesty of women, but only modesty of men which was fostered by Lycurgus' legislation. This is brought out by Xenophon at the beginning of his account of the Spartan marriage laws, the third and last topic of the first chapter. There he explains Lycurgus' provisions for training the Spartans in continence with regard to sexual intercourse. The husband was commanded to be ashamed if he were seen when entering or leaving his wife's room. Obedience to that command had, and was intended to have, a two-fold effect: it increased the feeling of shame, and at the same time it increased desire. The increase in desire was common to husband and wife, whereas the increase in bashfulness was in the husband only.<sup>2</sup> The other marriage laws gave the husband a surprisingly large freedom to indulge in adultery himself and to permit his wife to indulge. As a matter of fact that freedom appears to have been practically limitless; for after having explained two laws of the kind which by themselves were liberal enough, Xenophon adds that Lycurgus "made *many* concessions of that sort." Although he lets us only guess at the effect which these concessions were bound to have on the chastity of women, who furthermore were not subject to any dietary restrictions, he clearly states that the women had reasons of their own to be satisfied with these laws: "for the women [in Sparta] desire to control two households."<sup>3</sup>

We conclude then that the first chapter of the *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, apparently in praise of the Spartan legislation concerning procreation of children, is actually a disguised satire on Spartan women. Now Xenophon makes no distinction other than

<sup>1</sup> II, 14 and III, 4. The irony of the second statement is still more clear if one compares such passages as Plato, *Laws*, 802 e 8-10, and Aristotle, *Politics*, 1260 a 22 ff. and 1277 b 20 ff. Cf. Xenophon, *Agésilas*, 6, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. I, 5.

<sup>3</sup> I, 6-9. With regard to Spartan gynaeocracy, see Aristotle, *Politics*, 1269 b 24-34.

verbal between the actual behavior of Spartan women, present or past, and the behavior decreed by Lycurgus' legislation. We must, therefore, say that the satire on Spartan women is also a satire on Sparta in general and on Lycurgus' legislation.

## II

To show the excellence of Spartan education, Xenophon contrasts the public education of Sparta, which leads to virtue, with private education as practiced in other Greek cities, which leads to effeminacy. Here he uses the same device which he used before in discussing the Spartan laws on procreation of children: he indicates two major differences between, say, Athenian practice and Spartan practice, and although he clearly explains the second difference, he says nothing about a salient feature of the first and more important difference. Concerning this he says that Spartan education was public, while education in other Greek cities was private. Yet he mentions also that the other Greeks "send their children as soon as they understand what is spoken . . . immediately to teachers to learn letters, and music, and the exercises of the palaestra."<sup>1</sup> And he says no word in either the immediate context or any other passage of the treatise about what Lycurgus had enacted or what the Spartans were actually doing regarding education in "letters and music." This omission is as little a matter of chance as was the preceding and almost exactly corresponding omission of the Spartan dietary laws for girls: Xenophon informs us between the lines that in Sparta there was no education worth mentioning in letters and music.<sup>2</sup>

What was in its stead? Physical education, of course. Yet Spartan education had some specific features which Xenophon is very anxious for us to realize. He emphasizes the fact that Spartan children were instructed in stealing as well as in robbing and deceiv-

<sup>1</sup> II, 1. Cf. *Apologia Socratis*, 16.

<sup>2</sup> The mention of "teachers" of children other than Spartan in III, 1 serves the same purpose, as appears from a comparison of that paragraph with the rest of the chapter.

ing; and he defends especially the Spartan practice of punishing severely the children who were caught when attempting to steal, by the following remark: "Some one might say, why, then, if he [Lycurgus] judged stealing to be good, did he inflict many stripes on him who was caught? Because, I answer, in all other things, too, which men teach, they punish him who does not execute the instruction properly. Accordingly, the Spartans punish those who are caught because of their stealing badly."<sup>1</sup> His praise of the Spartan education in "stealing well" is in obvious contradiction of his censure of that practice in the *Cyropaedia*, and of a reference to it in the *Anabasis* which is, I believe, generally recognized as ironic.<sup>2</sup> A consideration of these parallels led a recent editor of the *Constitution of the Lacedemonians* to doubt the sincerity of Xenophon's praise of this type of education.<sup>3</sup> The doubt is fully justified, but insincerity is too vague a term for what is more precisely to be called irony. Or was Xenophon, who not only spoke ironically of the Spartan education in stealing in the *Anabasis* but who was, after all, a pupil of Socrates, incapable of irony? Can it not be seen that his justification of the Spartan custom of punishing those who "steal badly" is based on the ironic premise that "stealing is good," an art comparable to grammar or music or perhaps even to economics? Another feature characteristic of Spartan education and of Spartan life in general was arbitrary commands, with severe punishment, especially heavy whippings, for one caught disobeying the commands.<sup>4</sup> Xenophon's praise of that method of education is contradicted by what he says elsewhere about the superiority of education by persuasion and speech over education by compulsion.<sup>5</sup> We conclude then that the argument of the second chapter of the *Constitution of the Lacedemonians* is designed to let us glimpse the

<sup>1</sup> II, 6-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Cyropaedia*, I, 6, 31-32. *Anabasis*, IV, 6, 14-15.

<sup>3</sup> F. Ollier, *La république des Lacédémoniens* (Lyon 1934) p. xxxiii.

<sup>4</sup> II, 2 and 8-10. Cf. IV, 6; VI, 2; IX, 5; X, 4-7.

<sup>5</sup> *Memorabilia*, I, 2, 10. *Hiero*, 9, 2. *De re equestri*, 11, 6. *Cyropaedia*, I, 2, 2-3. *Oeconomicus*, 14, 7. The two last mentioned passages are direct parallels to *Respublica Lacedaemoniorum*, X, 4-7.

fact that in Sparta instruction in letters and music was replaced by instruction in stealing and by severe whipping.<sup>1</sup>

This conclusion is open to an objection which at first glance seems irrefutable. The most obvious parallel to Xenophon's description of Spartan education is his description of Persian education near the beginning of the *Cyropaedia*. A comparison of the two descriptions shows that he considered Persian education definitely superior to Spartan, not to say that he considered the former to be absolutely perfect. Now in his description of Persian education he again mentions the education in letters which was the custom of people other than the Persians, and fails to mention any Persian education of that kind. We seem therefore to be forced to conclude that Xenophon thus hints at the barbaric character of Persian education as well. Although I do not think that this is not borne out by the whole *Cyropaedia*, and by what many educated Greeks have thought of Persian education, I limit myself here to pointing out one important difference between Persian and Spartan education as described by Xenophon. If the Persians lacked schools of music and letters they certainly had schools of justice, an educational institution of high standing which was totally absent from Sparta.<sup>2</sup> In these schools, the Persian boys were taught to give and take account of their doings, which naturally developed the power of speech. It developed in Cyrus, for instance, not only a charming talkativeness,<sup>3</sup> but likewise a remarkable ability to harangue his soldiers as well as an almost Socratic habit of discovering the profitable truth, and of guiding men by having dialogues with them in both jest and earnest. But was Xenophon not a soldier who as such attached importance to deeds rather than words? How-

<sup>1</sup> It is important to notice that Xenophon devotes only one chapter to the account of Spartan education (see the emphatic conclusion of the second chapter). This means that Lycurgus' regulations for adolescents and young men, which are discussed in the third and fourth chapters, cannot possibly be brought under the heading "education"—at least not by a man who knows what education really is. The reason that Xenophon could speak of Spartan "education" of boys, is indicated below (p. 511, note 4).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. II, 1 ff. with *Cyropaedia*, I, 2, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Cyropaedia*, I, 4, 3.

ever this may be, it is precisely with regard to military matters that he stresses the decisive importance of speech for commanding human beings, as distinguished from speechless animals.<sup>1</sup> Now Spartan children and adolescents were not trained in speech but in utter taciturnity: Lycurgus commanded the adolescents "to walk along in silence," and "you would hear no more sound of a voice from them than from stone statues."<sup>2</sup> Thus the Persians had no education in letters and music, but did have education in speech; while both letters and speech were ignored in Sparta.

Our contention has been that Xenophon, by mentioning education in letters and music in speaking of other Greeks and not mentioning it in speaking of the Spartans, wants us to give some thought to the absence of letters and music from Sparta. We might not have noticed the hint if we had not seen before the similar device used in discussing the upbringing of future mothers in Sparta and elsewhere. That was, however, much more obvious. He gave two complete sentences exclusively to an account of the diet of other Greek girls, thus compelling us to expect a corresponding statement dealing exclusively, or at least chiefly, with the Spartans, and the total disappointment of our expectation led us to realize that something is wrong with his whole discourse. But concerning education in letters and music, he merely mentions the topic in a single sentence which seems to declare, not that education in letters and music was to be found in other Greek cities, but that education in other Greek cities was private and at least partly entrusted to slaves. And that sentence finds its natural supplement in a later one which shows that education in Sparta was public and entrusted to citizens of high standing.<sup>3</sup> Therefore the curiosity raised by the first sentence is almost completely satisfied, and we are not compelled to remain vigilant to the same extent as we were in the case of his account of the girls or women. The difference in the use of the same device is hardly surprising once one has seen that music and

<sup>1</sup> *Memorabilia*, III, 3, 11. *De re equestri*, 8, 13.

<sup>2</sup> III, 4-5. Cf. above p. 507, note 1.

<sup>3</sup> II, 1-2.

letters, and speech, are much more directly connected with the hidden truth than is continence, which is only a rather remote, if indispensable, means for the true end of human life.

Xenophon concludes his account of Spartan education by praise of the continence of the Spartans in love between men and boys. He points out that "some people" will not believe his laudatory statements, and he gives us to understand why they are bound to be exaggerated. All that he says about the actual Spartan practice amounts to this, that in Sparta lovers refrain from sexual intercourse with boys no less than parents refrain from intercourse with their children, or brothers with brothers and sisters.<sup>1</sup> Now incest cannot possibly be avoided in a city where adultery is as common as it is in Sparta according to Xenophon's description, i.e. where it is very difficult, if not impossible, to know exactly who one's nearest relatives are.<sup>2</sup> Xenophon alludes to the obscurity of Spartan family relations by tracing the lax marriage laws back to the desire of the Spartans "to add brothers to their children," and by occasionally stating that "these [other men] are the fathers of the children whom he himself [the individual Spartan] rules."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he concludes his description of how Spartan youths behave at the common meals by the remark, "And of the beloved boys he [Lycurgus] took care in the manner described."<sup>4</sup> Above all, he almost explicitly retracts his praise of Spartan bashfulness in matters of love between men and boys by declaring that when observing the Spartan youths going to the public mess rooms "you would believe them to be more bashful than the very virgins in the bridal chambers."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> II, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1262 a 32 ff.

<sup>3</sup> I, 9 and VI, 2. Compare *Hellenica*, III, 3, 1-2, with *Agesilaus*, 1, 5.

<sup>4</sup> III, 5 (according to the reading of the mss). It is hardly unintentional that Xenophon uses in this context four words which allude in one way or another to matters of love. Nor ought we to overlook his playing on the relations between Spartan education (*paideia*) and love of boys (*paidikoi erotes*) in II, 12-14.

<sup>5</sup> III, 5 (according to the reading of the mss). The editors reject the mss readings in this as well as in a number of similar cases in favor either of variants supplied by the indirect tradition or of conjectural readings, for no other reason than that they do not take into consideration the Aristophanean inclinations of Xenophon.

## III

The two most striking features so far discussed of Spartan legislation or of Spartan life as described by Xenophon are the lax marriage laws and the principle underlying Spartan education that "stealing is good." He justifies these two sets of rules by showing the good influence which they exercised on Spartan virtue: the lax marriage laws were conducive to the procreation of strong and healthy offspring, and the instruction in stealing was conducive to military efficiency.<sup>1</sup> We have therefore to take up the question of the place which Xenophon assigned to physical excellence and military efficiency within the framework of human excellence or virtue.

Xenophon clearly states his standard for judging the quality of human abilities and habits: the superiority of the soul over the body.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the many things which he says in praise of the physical excellence of the Spartans cannot be more than a mere introduction to the much more important praise of the excellence of their souls. Hence we shall have to consider, rather more carefully than usual, the meaning of his emphatic statement that Lycurgus "compelled all [the Spartans] to practice all virtues publicly."<sup>3</sup>

We naturally expect to meet in his description the whole choir of the virtues, but we are disappointed just as we were before. Although Lycurgus was "very wise in the extreme [extremes],"<sup>4</sup> neither wisdom nor education in wisdom is mentioned in the whole treatise. There is no word of justice or schools of justice although punishment, and severe punishment, is mentioned on almost every page, and although the procedure concerning lawsuits is briefly

<sup>1</sup> I, 5-10 and II, 7.

<sup>2</sup> X, 3. Xenophon illustrates the Spartan conception of "soul" in such passages as VII, 3-4 and X, 2-3. Cf. VIII, 1 (MSS).

<sup>3</sup> X, 4.

<sup>4</sup> I, 2. The expression used by Xenophon is ambiguous: it may mean that Lycurgus was exceedingly wise, but then it is redundant; or it may mean that he was very wise with regard to the extremes, and then it is not redundant but most appropriate: Xenophon leaves it undetermined whether the extremes with regard to which Lycurgus was very wise were good or bad. Arts are mentioned, as far as Sparta is concerned, almost exclusively in connection with war (I, 3; VII, 1; XI, 2; XIII, 5 and 7).

indicated.<sup>1</sup> The other Greek cities punished anyone who did an injustice in anything to another, but Lycurgus "inflicted no lesser penalties on him who appeared to neglect to be excellent. For he believed, as it seems, that from those who kidnap some people, or rob something, or steal, the damaged ones only suffer injustice, but that by the bad and unmanly ones whole cities are betrayed. So that he seems to me to have fittingly inflicted on the latter the heaviest penalties." Xenophon then again omits something: he does not tell us what Lycurgus had believed or enacted concerning injustice. Or rather he expects us to remember his earlier finding that Lycurgus "believed stealing to be good."<sup>2</sup> Considering the facts that wisdom was not met with in Sparta, and that Socrates did not separate wisdom and moderation,<sup>3</sup> we are not surprised to observe that Xenophon fails to ascribe moderation to the Spartans except in the ambiguous sentence that in Sparta "the male tribe is stronger than those of female nature even as regards being moderate."<sup>4</sup> If, then, wisdom and justice and moderation are virtues alien to the Spartans, we must qualify Xenophon's statement that Lycurgus "compelled all [the Spartans] to practice all virtues publicly" with the limitation that he compelled them to practice all virtues with the exception of wisdom, justice and moderation. As a matter of fact, that limitation, implied in "publicly," is made by Xenophon himself when he repeats his emphatic statement later on in a somewhat modified form: Lycurgus "imposed even an irresistible necessity to practice the whole political virtue."<sup>5</sup> An irresistible necessity to practice wisdom, for instance, can hardly be imagined. One may sum up Xenophon's view of Spartan virtue by saying that there is

<sup>1</sup> XIII, 11. Injustice is mentioned also in VII, 5 and XIV, 6.

<sup>2</sup> X, 5-6 and II, 7-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Memorabilia*, III, 9, 4.

<sup>4</sup> III, 4. Xenophon states, it is true, that at the common meals of the Spartans "in the least degree insolence (i.e. the opposite of moderation) . . . occurs" (V, 6). But one immediately sees how reserved this praise is when one remembers that even at the doors of the Persian kings "one might observe much moderation" (*Anabasis*, I, 9, 3). With regard to *sophronizein* as used in XIII, 5, compare *Cyropaedia*, III, 1, 16 ff.

<sup>5</sup> X, 7. For the meaning of "political virtue," compare Plato, *Phaedo*, 82 a 10-b 8, and *Republic*, 430 c 3-5, and Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1116 a 15 ff.

no greater difference between the virtue of Sparta and the virtue of other cities as cities than that between the virtue of "practicing" laymen and of negligent laymen. For if virtue is wisdom, and since wisdom is found in only a very few individuals, the difference between the so-called virtue of all citizens and true virtue must be even greater than the difference between the skill of a quack and the skill of a physician.<sup>1</sup>

The conclusion which we have reached thus far might be criticized as being based on an argument from silence. Although this objection is not quite valid, for it mistakes speech interspersed with silence for silence pure and simple, and although the principle that arguments from silence are not permissible must undergo important modifications before it can be applied to the writings of Xenophon, it will be wise to limit our further discussion of Xenophon's descriptions of Spartan virtue as strictly as possible to his explicit statements. We shall then say that the individual virtues which he explicitly mentions with regard to the Spartans are, not wisdom and moderation and justice, but continence and bashfulness and obedience.<sup>2</sup>

There is a certain affinity between continence (*enkrateia*) and moderation (*sophrosynē*), an affinity which permits identification of them for almost every practical purpose, and the use of the two terms in many cases synonymously. Yet the two qualities are far from being identical.<sup>3</sup> Moderation, which cannot be separated from wisdom, is of greater dignity than continence, which is merely the "basement" of virtue.<sup>4</sup> Continence is concerned with the pleasures of the body as well as with the pleasures deriving from property.<sup>5</sup> Not to repeat what we quoted before in discussing Xenophon's remarks about marriage laws and education,<sup>6</sup> we shall

<sup>1</sup> Cf. X, 4 with *Memorabilia*, III, 9, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. II, 14 with 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Cyropaedia*, I, 2, 8 and VIII, 1, 30-32; *Agésilas*, 10, 2; *Apologia Socratis*, 19. It may be remarked in passing that Xenophon's view of the relation of the two qualities differs from Aristotle's not only in details but in fundamentals.

<sup>4</sup> *Memorabilia*, I, 5, 4 and III, 9, 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Memorabilia*, I, 5, 6.

<sup>6</sup> See in particular I, 5.

merely point out that even the Spartan men do not seem to have been subject to very severe regulations concerning the quantity of food and drink which they could consume. Concerning drinking in particular, Lycurgus "gave permission that everyone should drink when he was thirsty, believing that the drink would thus be most innoxious as well as most pleasant." That is to say, Lycurgus made thirst, or the throat and the stomach, the measure of potation.<sup>1</sup> Much more significant were his laws concerning property. Xenophon tells us that Lycurgus prohibited the free from having anything to do with acquisitive occupations of any kind, and that he commanded them to devote themselves entirely to those activities which secure freedom to cities. He explains, moreover, how the whole set-up of the Spartan community prevented the Spartans from being eager to acquire wealth. Finally, he emphasizes the fact that the heavy weight of the Spartan money made secrecy in acquiring wealth utterly impossible. In the present case, the method which he chooses for letting us see the truth is that of proving too much. For whereas he states to begin with that acquisition of wealth as such is forbidden in Sparta, somewhat later on he states that acquisition of wealth by unjust means is prevented by the heavy weight of the Spartan money, which could be concealed only with great difficulty. The question naturally arises as to whether the Spartans could not procure for themselves gold or silver, which is more easily hidden. The answer must be in the affirmative, else it would not have been necessary to institute searches for gold and silver.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, whereas his original statement implies that the set-up of Spartan life ruled out any interest in wealth, we soon learn from him that punitive measures were required to prevent the Spartans from acquiring money.<sup>3</sup> In addition, he draws our attention to the fact that, although wealth cannot be earnestly sought by the Spartans, wealth, and the difference between rich and poor citizens, does exist in the ideal Sparta.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V, 3-4. Cf. II, 1 end.

<sup>2</sup> VII, 2 and 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> VII, 3-6. See F. Habben, *De Xenophontis libello . . .* (Münster 1909) p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> V, 3; VI, 5; X, 7; XIII, 11.

Was Spartan wealth, then, due exclusively to windfalls? Was the belief of the legislator that "stealing is good" and his failure to punish those who kidnap or rob or steal, of no account in this respect? Particularly interesting is Xenophon's remark that the Spartans desire "to add such brothers to their children who participate in descent and power, but have no claim to the property." That desire certainly implies some serious interest in wealth.<sup>1</sup> And what becomes of the noble poverty of the Spartans and their frugality if the king must be given "so much choice land in many subject cities that he will be neither in want of moderate means nor outstanding as regards wealth"?<sup>2</sup> Finally, we ought not overlook any longer that Xenophon states quite openly what he thinks of the continence in money matters of the ideal Spartans of the past; for he says "in former times, I know, they were afraid of being seen in the possession of gold."<sup>3</sup>

This quotation forms a natural transition from Spartan continence to the Spartan sense of shame, a quality which Xenophon stresses more than any other of their peacetime virtues.<sup>4</sup> Sense of shame or bashfulness, too, has something in common with that true virtue called moderation, which he does not attribute to the Spartans. And yet it is still more inferior to moderation than is continence. It was no less a person than Cyrus, the founder of the Persian empire, who according to Xenophon distinguished between moderation and sense of shame in approximately this way: "the shamed avoid shameful things in the light of day, whereas the moderate avoid them even in secret."<sup>5</sup> Sense of shame, then, is certainly not a genuine virtue: it is concerned simply with external goodness, or with the appearance of goodness. Now it is easy to see that Lycurgus was interested in visible goodness only. It is for this reason that he inflicted so many penalties on him who was seen or caught when acting improperly; prescribed decent behavior for

<sup>1</sup> I, 9. Cf. Habben, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> XV, 3.

<sup>3</sup> XIV, 3. This remark is foreshadowed by the abrupt transition from VII to VIII.

<sup>4</sup> I, 5; II, 2, 10, and 14; III, 4 and 5; V, 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Cyropaedia*, VIII, 1, 31.

adolescents walking on the roads; and dragged the Spartans out of their private houses into the public mess rooms.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, what he brought to light was not the Spartans, but the public mess rooms; for his view that by creating that institution he would render impossible the transgression of his laws was merely a belief.<sup>2</sup> By educating the Spartans in bashfulness only, while withholding from them true education—education in letters and speech, education in wisdom and moderation and justice—in other words, by frightening them into submissiveness with the menace of severe and dishonoring punishments, he compelled them to do forbidden things in utter secrecy. He even educated his citizens from their very childhood in the art of concealment by teaching them to avoid being caught. The only relief found by the Spartans was spying on each other.<sup>3</sup> The famous Spartan sense of shame is then simply hypocrisy, and the so-called decline of the Spartans' virtue was merely a decline of their dissimulation: the present Spartans were distinguished from their forefathers merely by the fact that they visibly and openly disobeyed Lycurgus' laws.<sup>4</sup> Now since sense of shame is concerned with visible goodness or with public goodness only, it is, in a sense, identical with virtue practiced in public, or with political virtue.<sup>5</sup> To reduce the fallacy underlying the Spartan ideal to its principle we need merely repeat Xenophon's emphatic statement that Lycurgus compelled all the Spartans to practice all virtues publicly: that is, he did not (and he could not) compel them to practice virtue in private.<sup>6</sup>

The third and last of the Spartan peacetime virtues is obedience. Obedience is submission to the laws and to the rulers. Its value, therefore, depends on the wisdom of the laws or of the rulers in question: obedience to the foolish or unjust enactments of a tyrant

<sup>1</sup> I, 5; II, 10 f. and 13; III, 4; VII, 6 (see XIV, 3); X, 5. Cf. these passages with II, 8.

<sup>2</sup> V, 2.

<sup>3</sup> "He who designs to get something [i. e. especially the 'noble things,' or the honors of the city], must employ spies." Cf. II, 7 with IV, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. XIV, 3 and 7.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Memorabilia*, III, 7, 5 with *Cyropaedia*, VIII, 1, 31.

<sup>6</sup> Notice the connection between "private pedagogues" (II, 2) and "letters and music" (II, 1). Cf. Plato, *Laws*, 666e.

continence  
shame  
obedience



or a mob or of any other individual or group is certainly no virtue. Now we have seen what Xenophon thinks of the dignity of Lycurgus' laws which, while containing many concessions concerning adultery, do not contain the slightest provision for genuine education.<sup>1</sup> Seeing, moreover, that the root of the Spartans' obedience is the same as the root of their sense of shame, i. e. fear of severe whipping,<sup>2</sup> we should be permitted to go on to another topic but for one fact: Xenophon's Socrates is known to have taught that justice is identical with obedience to the laws, to any laws, and to have praised in the same context Lycurgus' educating the Spartans in such obedience.<sup>3</sup>

(digression)

Socrates

To understand the meaning of this passage in the *Memorabilia* we must briefly consider the character of the work of which it forms so outstanding a part. The intention of the *Memorabilia* is to show what Socrates did and what he said, not what he thought. More precisely, the intention of that work is not to show explicitly what

<sup>1</sup> Xenophon's judgment on the reasonableness, or lack of reasonableness of Lycurgus' legislation is indicated first by his allusions to the arbitrary character of the noble things (*kala*) recognized as such by the Spartans (II, 9 and 10; IV, 4; VI, 2). It is shown most clearly by his use, in speaking of Lycurgus, of the word *nomizein* in its two meanings: "enacting" and "believing" (see especially II, 4 and I, 6 f.). For what Lycurgus "believed" is distinguished with some care from what he "saw" and what he "observed": in some cases, what he "believed" and "enacted" is opposed to what he "saw" and "observed," i. e. opposed to the nature of things, or more precisely to human nature (see in particular I, 5 and 7). As a consequence, his legislation is opposed to the views of the other Greeks, or of most men, or even of all men (see especially I, 7, II, 13, and III, 4). For the laws which are acknowledged by all men are the unwritten or natural laws (*Memorabilia*, IV, 4, 19 ff.). Since he opposes the views of all men or of all Greeks, Lycurgus deserves to be "wondered at" (cf. I, 2 with 1). Another way of expressing the same judgment is to say that Lycurgus' laws are "very old," and yet "very new" to the other Greek cities (X, 8); for the laws of the other Greeks are less old and therefore less barbaric (cf. Thucydides, I, 6, 6). Xenophon's statement that the Spartan laws are opposed to the laws of most or all men reads like an adaptation of a similar statement by Herodotus about the Egyptian laws (II, 35). The relation between Sparta and Egypt is a major theme of Plato's *Laws*, and it is discussed by Plato in the same spirit in which Xenophon points out the oldness of Lycurgus' laws. See also Herodotus, VI, 60, and Isocrates, *Busiris*, 17.

<sup>2</sup> II, 2 and 10. (Not to mention the fact that the Greek word in question—*peitho*—is ambiguous.) Cf. also the scarcely disguised identification of obedience with fear in VIII, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Memorabilia*, IV, 4, 15. Cf. *Cyropaedia*, III, 3, 8, among many other passages.

his private views were. In the main it openly states his public views, i. e. the opinions which he uttered in public and in private conversation with people who were merely members of the public. Their not quite serious nature is indicated between the lines, i. e. by occasional remarks which are in flagrant contradiction to his public views and which, therefore, are apt to be deleted by modern editors, as well as by the well known and so to speak famous deficiencies of the plan of both the whole work and a number of individual chapters.<sup>1</sup> It is, therefore, impossible to find what Xenophon's Socrates really thought by merely looking up or even by reading often an individual chapter or the whole work; in order to discover Xenophon's and Socrates' private views one must do some private thinking, and especially one must in each case deduct from Socrates' statements that deliberate distortion of the truth which was caused by his compliance with, and adaptation to, the specific imbecility of the interlocutor to whom he happened to talk. Or, to express the same thing somewhat differently, we cannot take at face value any individual statement of Xenophon's Socrates which is contradicted by the principle governing the plan of the whole work. That plan is based on the assumption that "speech" is superior to "deed."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the speech in which Socrates "proves" that justice is identical with obedience to the laws of the city starts from the assumption, suggested by Socrates and adopted without consideration by his interlocutor, that "deed" is more relevant than "speech."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the argument which the interlocutor advances against Socrates' assertion that justice is identical with obedience to the laws misses the point, as is shown by a parallel argumentation used by a more intelligent or a franker man which

<sup>1</sup> With regard to the plan of the *Memorabilia*, compare Emma Edelstein, *Xenophonisches und Platonisches Bild des Sokrates* (Berlin 1935) pp. 78-137.

<sup>2</sup> The positive part of the *Memorabilia* (I, 3 to the end) consists of 37 chapters of which only the first or, perhaps, the first three are devoted to "deed," whereas almost all the rest is devoted to "speech." Cf. also III, 3, 11 with Plato, *Gorgias*, 450 c-d. For the meaning of the "deed-speech" antithesis, which is an ironical expression of the antithesis between practical or political life and theoretical life, compare Plato, *Apology*, 32 a 4-5 with *Crito*, 52 d 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Memorabilia*, IV, 4, 10. Cf. also the beginning of that chapter.

occurs in the same work,<sup>1</sup> and therefore Socrates' refutation of the interlocutor's denial is a mere *argumentatio ad hominem*. Besides, the talk opens with a statement by Socrates which refutes in advance his later thesis, i. e. that it is extremely difficult to find a teacher of the just things; for if just were the same as legal, every legal expert, nay, every member of the popular assembly would be a teacher of justice. And finally, after having "proved" his point, Socrates suddenly turns from the laws of the city to the unwritten (or natural) laws, and he thus, and only thus, indicates the crucial question, the question of the possible divergence and opposition of the laws of the city and the natural laws. We conclude, then, that neither Xenophon nor Socrates accepted seriously the view that justice is identical with obedience to the laws of the city, regardless of the justice of the laws. Therefore, the insertion of praise of Lycurgus' legislation into the "dialectic" proof of that view, far from refuting our interpretation of the *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, actually is a strong argument in favor of it.<sup>2</sup>

Then what remains of Spartan virtue? Manliness, of course. It should be mentioned, however, that the ordinary term designating that virtue occurs only once in the whole treatise, and then in a passage where its meaning is exceedingly ambiguous.<sup>3</sup> True, a synonymous term does occur once in a passage where its meaning is entirely clear,<sup>4</sup> and in all the passages where Xenophon speaks of the Spartans' virtue, or *kalokagathia*, he is, of course, thinking mainly if not exclusively of their manliness.<sup>5</sup> Thus we are confronted with the question of how Xenophon judged of manliness

<sup>1</sup> *Memorabilia*, I, 2, 41 ff.

<sup>2</sup> It is hardly necessary to say that Xenophon, *Apologia Socratis*, 15, cannot be adduced as an argument to the contrary. For whoever bases an objection on that passage commits the mistake warned against by Socrates himself in that very context of believing without consideration the Delphian god (or his priestess, or the men who heard him or her say . . .), if not the still more serious mistake (indicated by the words "not even this") of believing a statement of the Delphian god which implies an impossibility. Cf. the parallel of a similar meaning in Plato's *Apology*, 20c-21a.

<sup>3</sup> IX, 5 (according to the good mss). "Unmanly people" are mentioned in X, 6.

<sup>4</sup> IV, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Compare, however, IX, 1 with the beginning of the treatise.

taken alone, a manliness not accompanied by wisdom, moderation or justice. It is in his eulogy of the Spartan king Agesilaus, the work of his which is in every respect nearest akin to the *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, that he indicates his view that manliness taken alone is hardly distinguishable from madness.<sup>1</sup> Now manliness is primarily the virtue of war,<sup>2</sup> and thus the answer to the question of the dignity of manliness as compared with that of the other virtues implies the answer to the question of the dignity of war as such as compared with that of peace as such.

#### IV

We have started from the tacit assumption that the literary technique of those non-rhetorical Greek prose writers before Aristotle whose writings have come down to us is essentially different from the technique of the large majority of later writers: the former, being teachers of moderation, teach the truth according to the rule of moderation, i. e. they teach the truth exclusively between the lines. Accordingly, we have refrained from considering the conjecture which is an outcome of higher criticism—that Xenophon composed the censure of contemporary Sparta which he inserted toward the end of the treatise after the composition of the other fourteen chapters. This conjecture is based on the observation of the contradictions between that censure and the bulk of the treatise. But these contradictions are not the only ones which occur in the treatise. The conjecture in question is based, moreover, on observation of the most irregular way in which the censure of contemporary Sparta is inserted. But irregularities occur within every chapter and within many individual sentences of the treatise; and the difficulties offered by these cannot be called less than that presented by the most striking irregularity—provided one does not understand by a great difficulty one which is very easily noticed by even the most superficial reader. Considering the fact, for it is a

<sup>1</sup> *Agesilaus*, 2, 12 and 7.

<sup>2</sup> Notice the mention of "noble death" at the beginning of IX, the chapter devoted to manliness. Cf. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1115 a 32-33.

fact, that the use of irregularities of composition as well as of contradictions is characteristic of the technique employed by that small group of writers to which Xenophon belongs, we may take for granted (as we are entitled to do in the absence of any external evidence to the contrary) that Xenophon conceived all chapters of the treatise in one coherent movement of his mind.<sup>1</sup>

He sandwiches in his censure of contemporary Sparta exactly in the middle of the last section. That section is given to the Spartan kingdom and consists of two chapters: the first (Chapter 13) is devoted to the power and honor which the Spartan king enjoys when he is with the army, and the second (Chapter 15) treats of the honors which he enjoys at home.<sup>2</sup> By slipping between these

<sup>1</sup> The most striking difficulty which the treatise offers is that in the bulk of it Xenophon seems to speak quite indiscriminately of what Lycurgus had enacted in the past and of what the Spartans were actually doing in his own time, whereas in his censure of contemporary Sparta he draws a sharp line of demarcation between the perfect Sparta of the past and the defective Sparta of the present. Yet he states at the very beginning of the treatise that he is going to discuss a phenomenon belonging to the past: "After having once perceived that Sparta, one of the most thinly populated cities, had come into sight as the most powerful as well as the most celebrated city in Greece, I fell to wondering how in the world this had happened. But after I had considered the institutions of the Spartiates, I no longer wondered" (I, 1). This introduction is almost exactly parallel to that of the *Memorabilia*: "I often fell to wondering by what speeches in the world the accusers of Socrates had convinced the Athenians that he deserved death at the hands of the city." In the case of Sparta as well as in that of Socrates, Xenophon refers to a definite event in the past which set him thinking about its causes; in neither case does he refer to a phenomenon which still existed. The event to which he refers at the beginning of the *Constitution of the Lacedemonians* is very probably the victory of the Spartans in the Peloponnesian war. In accordance with the beginning quoted he speaks in the first chapter mostly of what Lycurgus had enacted in the past, and only toward the end does he go over to the present. In II and III the past still outweighs the present. In IV-X, the passages devoted to the past are almost equal in number to those devoted to the present. In XI and XII, the present outweighs the past, and in XIII, i. e. in the chapter immediately preceding the censure of contemporary Sparta, Xenophon praises contemporary Sparta almost exclusively: so openly does he contradict himself, and so carefully did he prepare that flagrant contradiction. Needless to add, the subtle distinctions between "Lycurgus' enactments" and "the Spartans' actual practice" should be considered carefully. It is certainly not a matter of chance that in the chapters devoted to military matters the actual practice of the Spartans is so much in the foreground, whereas in the chapter devoted to continence concerning money, for example, Xenophon prefers to speak of Lycurgus' enactments.

<sup>2</sup> XIII, 1 and XV, 8.

two a chapter which is devoted to the censure of contemporary Sparta, and in which not even the word "king" occurs, Xenophon seems to deprive his whole treatise of the great virtue of a lucid and unambiguous order. Or did he prefer an ambiguous order?

In building up his treatise, the author of the *Cyropaedia* and the *Hiero* and the *Agésilas* naturally was guided by his high opinion of the institution of monarchy, or of the question of monarchy. Accordingly he was compelled to present the Spartan kingdom as the peak of Spartan institutions. Now "the vale best discovers the hill." Therefore he had to put the account of Spartan monarchy at the end of his praise of the Spartan constitution, and he had to arrange the several topics of his treatise in such a way that their sequence represented an ascent in a straight line from the lowest topic to the highest, which is monarchy.<sup>1</sup> He did this by choosing as his first topic the laws concerning procreation of children; for these laws are concerned with that side of man's nature which he has in common with the animals. From procreation of children (I),<sup>1</sup> Xenophon gradually ascends by way of education (II), adolescents (III), adult men (IV), continence as regards pleasures of the body (V-VI), continence as regards wealth (VI-VII), obedience (VIII), manliness (IX), the whole political virtue (X), war (XI-XIII), to the heroic kingdom of Sparta (XIII and XV). This plan implies the view that the way from peace to war is an ascent: for war is the last topic before kingdom, which is the highest; it implies the view that peace is but the preparation for war and the means to it.<sup>2</sup> Now it is exactly this lucid and unambiguous plan which Xenophon completely spoils by inserting the fourteenth chapter, the censure of contemporary Sparta, for in so doing he destroys the coherence of the section devoted to monarchy (XIII and XV). And what he thus spoils is not merely the lucidity of his plan, but, which is much more important, the solemnity of his praise of the kingdom of Sparta. At the same time, however, he gives us to understand that

<sup>1</sup> Note the solemn and poetic ending of the treatise.

<sup>2</sup> It goes without saying that a plan implying that view is most appropriate to a praise of Sparta.

the end of the thirteenth chapter is the actual end of the praise of Lycurgus' legislation: he thus dismisses especially the solemn end of the treatise as something which is merely poetic and unserious. As a consequence he compels us to reconsider the plan of the first thirteen chapters taken alone. These are clearly divided into two main sections: the first (I-X) dealing with institutions related to peace and war alike, the second (XI-XIII) with institutions related to war exclusively.<sup>1</sup> The insertion of the fourteenth chapter ruins, then, the plan based on the view that the way from procreation of children to the heroic kingdom is an ascent; but far from ruining, it rather enhances the plan based on the view that the distinction between peace and war is of paramount importance for the judgment of any constitution. By inserting his censure of contemporary Sparta in the "wrong" place, Xenophon suggests that the praise of Spartan monarchy, which is in the foreground, must be reconsidered in the light of the distinction, which is rather in the background, between peace and war, and of all that is implied in that distinction; he gives us to understand that the belief underlying the first plan, that war is superior to peace, must be subjected to reflection.<sup>2</sup>

The result to which the examination of that belief leads is indicated in all that Xenophon says and leaves unsaid about Spartan virtue. It is indicated besides in his emphatic praise of the fact that Lycurgus' legislation fostered among the citizens of Sparta the spirit of dissension and rivalry as well as spying on each other.<sup>3</sup> For, according to the view of the classical thinkers, one cannot assert that war against other cities is the aim of the life of the city without being driven to assert that war of individual against in-

<sup>1</sup> XI, 1. Cf. XII, 1 and XIII, 1.

<sup>2</sup> The "first plan" is more visible than the "second plan" if one disregards the fourteenth chapter. For the impressive ending of the treatise is warranted by the "first plan" only, and the most impressive things are the most visible ones. The "second plan" is obscured not only by that impressive ending, but by the fifteenth chapter as a whole, for that chapter deals again with matters of peace rather than of war, and the section devoted to matters of peace had been concluded at the end of the tenth chapter.

<sup>3</sup> IV.

dividual is the aim of the life of the individual.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Xenophon concludes the first section of the treatise—the section which is devoted to institutions related to peace and war alike—in such a way that that passage appears to be the end of the whole account of Spartan legislation; he thus indicates that institutions related to war exclusively do not deserve very serious attention.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, he excuses himself for the prolixity of his very brief account of Spartan camp-life.<sup>3</sup> And, finally, by devoting the last chapter of the treatise to matters of peace rather than to matters of war, he shows, if in a distortion most appropriate to his subject, that the end ought to be peace, and not war.<sup>4</sup>

## V

The title indicates that the subject of the treatise is the constitution of the Lacedemonians, and the apparent plan all but compels us to assume that that constitution is monarchic.<sup>5</sup> By spoiling his plan, however, Xenophon shows that that assumption is wrong.<sup>6</sup> If we exclude therefore all he says about the Spartan kings, we find that his treatment of the constitution proper is

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Plato, *Laws*, 626c-630d, and Aristotle, *Politics*, 1324a 5-1325a 15. WAR

<sup>2</sup> X, 8. (Cf. also XI, 1). The Spartan military institutions may not deserve discussion for yet another reason. "Xénophon vante beaucoup dans cet ouvrage les formations de l'armée spartiate; mais lui-même, pendant la retraite des Dix Mille, avait fait adopter par tous les corps des formations athéniennes, et, lorsqu'il décrira la bataille de Thymbrée, c'est des formations et de la tactique athéniennes qu'il dotera l'armée de Cyrus." Ollier, *op. cit.* p. xxxiii. The judgment on Spartan military organization, which is implied in the discrepancies pointed out by M. Ollier, is clearly indicated in XI, 7. Other shortcomings of the Spartan army are indicated in XII, 2-4, as can be seen from a comparison of that passage with *Cyropaedia*, IV, 2, 1-8, and *Agésilas*, 2, 24.

<sup>3</sup> XII, 7.

<sup>4</sup> For Xenophon's view of peace and war, see especially *Memorabilia*, II, 6, 21 f. *De vectigalibus*, 5; *Hiero*, 2, 7; *Oeconomicus*, 1, 23; and *Cyropaedia*, VIII, 4, 7-8. Cf. also *Symposium*, 1, 10 with *Respublica Lacedaemoniorum*, XI, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. XV, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Xenophon shows that the power of the Spartan kings is limited to the functions of priests and of leaders of the army: whereas the king has "power and honor" in time of war, he enjoys only "honors" in time of peace (cf. XIII, 1 and 10 f. with XV, 8). The Spartan king is thus induced by the very constitution to prefer war to peace. (Cf. Thucydides, VIII, 5, 3, and Isocrates, *Nicocles*, 24.) By letting us see this, Xenophon indicates his judgment of the wisdom of that provision.

very scanty: not a single chapter of the *Constitution of the Lacedemonians* is explicitly devoted to that topic. Thus the title seems to be inadequate. Now inadequate titles appear to have had a peculiar attraction for Xenophon: the titles of the *Anabasis* and of the *Education of Cyrus* are no less inadequate than that of the *Constitution of the Lacedemonians*. Now the title of the *Education of Cyrus* was certainly chosen in order to draw our attention away from Cyrus' brilliant achievements toward his modest education; or, more precisely, in order to induce us to pay the greatest attention to his rather obscure education.<sup>1</sup> In a similar way, the title *Constitution of the Lacedemonians* was chosen to induce us to observe the somewhat obscure constitution of Sparta.

Xenophon conceals the true nature of that constitution by not even mentioning the apparently very powerful "Little Assembly," of which he speaks elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> He also hides rather carefully the fact that Sparta had not one but two kings.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he speaks most clearly of the government of Sparta in a chapter which is explicitly devoted, not to Spartan government, but to a certain Spartan virtue. Yet the virtue in question is obedience; and since he does not even mention the kings when speaking of Spartan obedience, but does emphasize the power of the ephors in that context, he leaves no serious doubt that the actual rulers of Sparta were the ephors. The ephors, he says, rule like tyrants.<sup>4</sup> But tyrants do not rule in accordance with laws.<sup>5</sup> Are the ephors then

ephors

<sup>1</sup> A full account, entitled *Ghengis Khan's Education*, of the whole life and work of that conqueror and empire-builder would afford a tolerably adequate parallel to Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*.

<sup>2</sup> *Hellenica*, III, 3, 8.

<sup>3</sup> In the whole thirteenth chapter, no single mention of the two kings occurs. At the beginning of the fifteenth chapter, Xenophon speaks again exclusively of "the king." In XV, 3 he leaves it undetermined whether Sparta was ruled by one or two kings, thus preparing us for the disclosure, in the following paragraph, that the Spartan kingdom was no monarchy. But after this paragraph he does not mention the second king again.

<sup>4</sup> VIII, 4. Cf. Plato, *Laws*, 712 d 4-5, and Aristotle, *Politics*, 1270 b 14-15. The fact that "constitution" is as such irreconcilable with "tyranny" shows that the very title of the treatise is ironic; cf. *Hellenica*, VI, 3, 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Memorabilia*, IV, 6, 12.

not subject to the laws of the city, i.e. to the laws of Lycurgus?<sup>1</sup> Or was Lycurgus himself not a lawgiver, subject to none but the Delphian god? Of one thing Xenophon appears to be convinced: the fact that Lycurgus did "not even attempt" to establish the Spartan order of life until he had made "like-minded" the most powerful men in the city. Whereas he makes it perfectly clear that these powerful men accompanied Lycurgus when he went to Delphi to ask the god for confirmation of the laws "which he himself had given," he says merely that they "helped in establishing the power of the office of the ephors."<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps not out of place to question the identity of the man or men with whom the most powerful Spartiates collaborated in establishing the power of the ephors. Did they collaborate simply with each other? (In other words, how far can Lycurgus be distinguished from the most powerful Spartiates or from the ephors? "Lycurgus is said to have lived in the days of the descendants of Heracles."<sup>3</sup> But all Spartan kings were, or claimed to be, descendants of Heracles. Is Lycurgus then a man who never dies?<sup>4</sup> However superstitious we may suppose Xenophon to have been, he certainly did not believe that such a man does or could exist *in rerum natura*. We are then led to the conclusion that, according to Xenophon, Lycurgus did not exist at all, or that "Lycurgus" was a mere name covering something much less solemn than an almost divine lawgiver belonging to a remote and venerable past. This conclusion is borne out by the following statement regarding the time and place proper for pitching camp: "the Lycurgus with regard to this is the king."<sup>5</sup> "Lycurgus" is, then, a name designating authority or the men in authority. The statement quoted implies besides that the Lycurgus concerning the most important affairs of the city (in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1270 b 30.

<sup>2</sup> VIII, 1, 3 and 5.

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is ambiguous: it also alludes to the extinction of the true race of Heracles in the remote past. Cf. below, pp. 532-3.

<sup>4</sup> X, 8. Cf. *Agésilas*, 1, 2. In accordance with this, Xenophon uses the past and the present indiscriminately in speaking of the Spartan legislation.

<sup>5</sup> XIII, 10 (according to the good mss). A parallel to this use of a proper name for designating a function is supplied by *Cyropaedia*, I, 4, 6 (*Sakas*).

other words the actual rulers subject to nothing but Delphian confirmation of their measures, or the tyrannic rulers of Sparta) is the ephors—if not those most powerful Spartiates who are able to sway the ephors. It is left to our discretion to decide whether the most powerful men in Sparta are different from, or identical with, those most wealthy Spartiates whose existence is alluded to by Xenophon on more than one occasion.

## VI

The *Constitution of the Lacedemonians*, far from being an encomium of Sparta, is actually a most trenchant, if disguised, satire on that city and its spirit. To justify this contention fully we have to indicate the reasons which induced Xenophon first to satirize Sparta, and then to conceal the satire.

He himself clearly indicates the reason for his writing a satire on Sparta. At the end of the tenth chapter, which reads as if it were the end of the whole treatise and which is in fact the esoteric end, he tells us that "all praise" the Spartan institutions. And the beginning of the treatise is the words "But I."<sup>1</sup> Praising and admiring Sparta was a fashion in his time. Fashions of that kind are bound to be more or less unreasonable and therefore an inducement to a discerning man, who judges the unreasonable to be ridiculous, to satirize them. Xenophon was such a man. To the "all" who praise the Spartan institutions, he answers by a treatise which opens with the words, "But I . . . fell wondering [and] I investigated these institutions."

One of the most famous admirers of Sparta was Critias, who was a poet and an enemy of Socrates and an oligarch. Critias was the author of two works, one in prose but one in verse, both entitled *Constitution of the Lacedemonians*. These were used by Xenophon and may be said to have been the model of his treatise on

<sup>1</sup> Compare also the emphatic transition from "all of us" to "I" in VIII, 1. Xenophon uses in all other cases the first person singular; and whereas elsewhere he says "I shall explain," "I believe," "I wonder," etc., he constantly speaks of what "I know" in the chapter devoted to the outspoken censure of contemporary Sparta. Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 544 c 2-3, and 7th Letter, 324 c 2-3.

the Spartan constitution.<sup>1</sup> As in all cases of the kind, what matters is not so much the agreements as the differences between the imitation and the model. Critias, who praises the Spartans, does not hesitate to attribute to them the virtue of moderation; Xenophon, who investigated their mode of life, and who knew better what moderation is, answers him by silence, i. e. by being silent on Spartan moderation. The hasty Critias does not hesitate to assert that the Spartan mode of life produces men fit for both thought and toil;<sup>2</sup> the slow Xenophon answers him by speech interspersed with silence, i. e. by emphasizing repeatedly how much the Spartans toiled and by being silent on their thinking.<sup>3</sup> We shall then say that the relation of Xenophon's treatise to the two writings of Critias is fundamentally that of the long speech of Protagoras in Plato's work of that name to actual speeches, now forgotten, of that personality.

But why does Xenophon conceal his satire on Sparta, or on Athenian laconism, so carefully, whereas it is a matter of common knowledge that Plato's *Protagoras* is a comedy? The *Constitution of the Lacedemonians* is sometimes censured for its exceeding scarcity of factual information on Sparta. But briefness of expression, brachylogy, was one of the most famous characteristics of the Spartans. Considering that briefness of expression is one of the most ordinary devices for not disclosing the truth, we may assume that the famous brachylogy of the Spartans had something to do with their desire to conceal the shortcomings of their mode of life. Such a desire may be called bashfulness. By expressing himself most briefly when discussing the Spartan vices, and by thus writing a disguised satire on Sparta, Xenophon adapts himself to the peculiar character of his subject and thus achieves a feat in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Habben, *op. cit.*, p. 52 ff. Notice also the poetic ending of the treatise.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. 6 (Diels).

<sup>3</sup> See II, 5; III, 7; IV, 7; X, 7; and especially V, 8. (In V, 4, which corresponds to Critias, fr. 6, l. 10 ff., he replaces *nús* by *gnómai*. Cf. *Symposium*, 2, 26.) It may be remarked in passing that the difference between, and opposition of, "toil" and "thought," which escaped Critias' notice, explains why Xenophon so likes the word *rhadiurgia*; the life of contemplation is definitely not a life of toil. Cf. III, 2 and IX, 1 with *Symposium*, 4, 13.

the art of writing which is surpassed only by Plato's *Laws*. For whereas Xenophon and Plato in their other works, as well as Herodotus and Thucydides and perhaps other writers before them, teach the truth according to the rule of moderation, the *Constitution of the Lacedemonians* as well as the *Laws* deviate somewhat from this established principle by teaching the truth according to the rule of bashfulness: both works are most bashful speeches about the most bashful of men.<sup>1</sup>

A censure of Sparta, moreover, was liable to be misunderstood by uncritical readers as a praise of Athens; for at the time when Xenophon wrote the uncritical reader scarcely saw an alternative to the choice between the Spartan and the Athenian spirit. And Xenophon did not wish to praise Athens. First of all, he had reasons of his own which forbade him to praise that city and that constitution which had condemned Socrates to death. And, besides, his taste did not allow him to praise Athens: he was an Athenian and for an Athenian to praise Athens was an easy thing, and the noble things are difficult.<sup>2</sup> By writing his censure of Sparta in such a way that the superficial and uncritical reader could not help taking it as praise of Sparta, Xenophon certainly prevented the uncritical admirer of Athens from being confirmed in his prejudices.

Finally, if one satirizes something one considers the thing in question ridiculous. One considers ridiculous those shortcomings of other people which do not hurt one. Educated people consider ridiculous only those shortcomings which betray lack of education. But being educated and therefore desiring not to offend others, they hide their laughter as well as they can from the uneducated. That is to say, an educated man will utter his ridicule of the lack of education, or barbarism of a given man or city or nation, only in the absence of the uneducated. In other words, a good satire on the barbarism of a given man or city or nation will be

<sup>1</sup> Note especially the extremely bashful manner in which Xenophon speaks of the subjects of the Spartans in XII, 2-4 and VII, 2, as compared with *Cyropaedia*, IV, 2, 1 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for a similar case of conscience, Plato, *Menexenus*, 235 d.

inaccessible to the superficial reader. This at least was Xenophon's view as he indicated in that chapter of his *Education of Cyrus* which teaches us how educated people jest: they jest about the uneducated in the absence of the latter. At the beginning of that chapter, he describes such jesting conversation as "most graceful speeches which incite to what is good."<sup>1</sup> The *Constitution of the Lacedemonians* is a speech of that kind: by being a most ably disguised satire on Spartan lack of education, it is a most graceful recommendation of education.

The treatise of Xenophon is, then, a remarkable document of Attic taste: it represents a higher type of comic speech than does classical comedy. Yet, just as there is no jest without underlying seriousness, there is no good taste which is not something more than taste. The true name of that taste which permeates Xenophon's writings is, not education, but philosophy.

Philosophic life was considered by the classical thinkers as fundamentally different from political life. And as far as political life raised a universal claim, i. e. as far as the city left no room for a private life which was more than economic, philosophic life, which of necessity is private, of necessity became opposed to political life. The incarnation of the political spirit was Sparta: Sparta and philosophy are incompatible.<sup>2</sup> Thus Sparta became, on the one hand, the natural starting point for any ruthless idealization of political life, or for any true utopia; and, on the other hand, it became the natural subject of any ruthless attack on political life, or of any philosophic satire. By satirizing Sparta, the philosophers then did not so much mean Sparta, the actual Sparta of the present or of the past, as the spirit of Sparta, or the conviction that man belongs, or ought to belong, entirely to the city. For it would be an overstatement to say that philosophy was compatible with Athens: Socrates was executed for not believing in the gods of Athens, in the gods of the city. By considering and

<sup>1</sup> *Cyropaedia*, II, 2.

<sup>2</sup> It is a joke of Socrates to speak of "Spartan [and Cretan] philosophy"; see Plato, *Protagoras*, 342 a-b.

Xenophon's  
taste

✓

Spartan  
spirit



reconsidering this fact, we grasp the ultimate reason why political life and philosophic life, even if compatible for almost all practical purposes, are incompatible in the last analysis: political life, if taken seriously, meant belief in the gods of the city, and philosophy is the denial of the gods of the city.

Atheism  
Socrates did not believe in the gods of the city, nor did his pupil Xenophon. But both master and pupil took every imaginable care to hide from the public their unbelief, so much so that even at the present time, when nobody believes any longer in the gods of Greek cities, one steps on slippery ground in dealing with Socrates' or Xenophon's belief or unbelief. Since they uttered their unbelief only in such a manner that the large majority might in no circumstances become aware of it, proofs of their unbelief necessarily are of such a character that they will not convince the majority of readers. But the only alternative to accepting as valid such proofs as the nature of the matter allows is higher criticism in the nineteenth century style, i. e. deleting important passages of Xenophon's writings, making a large number of superfluous textual emendations and assuming that Xenophon was not familiar with, or not able to live up to, the most elementary rules of lucid composition.

Belief in the gods of the city was apt to be connected with the belief that a god had given the laws of the city. The Spartans for instance believed that the Delphian god had given them their laws. Xenophon did not share that belief. He held the view that "Lycurgus" had finished the elaboration of his laws before he went to Delphi to ask Apollo for confirmation. Accordingly he distinguishes between the Spartans' obedience to Lycurgus' laws and their obedience to the god.<sup>1</sup>

Belief in the gods of the city was bound up with the belief in the existence of demigods or heroes, and therefore in particular with the belief in the possibility of sexual intercourse between immortal gods and mortal men. The Spartans for instance believed that their kings were descendants of Heracles, and that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. VIII, 5 and XIV, 7 with Plato, *Laws*, 624 a 1-6 and 634 e 1-2.

Heracles was the son of Zeus and a mortal mother.<sup>1</sup> The obvious plan of Xenophon's treatise is based on compliance with that belief: the treatise ascends from a fact which is common to men and animals, to the Spartan kings, who are assumed by the laws of Lycurgus to be not human beings but heroes. Xenophon did not accept that assumption, for he clearly realized that belief in the divine or heroic descent of the Spartan kings presupposes belief in the marital fidelity of all Spartan queens, and he had no high opinion of the chastity of Spartan women in general and of Spartan queens in particular.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, he spoiled that plan of his treatise which corresponded to the Spartan claim in question. But he went further: he clearly realized that the unjustified and unjustifiable claim of the Spartan kings was merely one consequence among many of the erroneous views which the Spartans and others held of the deity. He indicated this by speaking at the beginning of the treatise of how people feed their children, and by stating at the beginning of the last section that Sparta "feeds the king and those with him," and shortly thereafter, that the Spartan king, in his turn, "offers sacrifices to Zeus and to those with him." To indicate his view still more clearly, he soon goes over from the plurality of the gods ("Zeus and those with him") to a duality ("Zeus and Athena") and finally to the singular ("The god").<sup>3</sup>

The *Constitution of the Lacedemonians* appears to be praise of an admirable constitution. Since Xenophon was an adherent of aristocracy, the point of reference with regard to which he judges constitutions is the quality of the education which corresponds to the constitution in question. It is, therefore, noteworthy that he does not mention piety at all when he speaks of Spartan education. Thus he lets us see that piety is no essential part of the highest type of education. Or are we to judge his failure to mention piety in the same way we judged his failure to mention moderation and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. XV, 9 and 2 with *Agésilas*, 1, 2, and *Cynegeticus*, 1, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. I, 4-9 with *Agésilas*, 1, 5 and *Hellenica*, III, 3, 1-3 and VII, 1, 31.

<sup>3</sup> I, 3 and XIII, 1-3. Cf. *Apologia Socratis*, 24. A censure of the moral side of the Spartan view of the gods is implied in the last sentence of XIII, 3, as appears from a comparison of that passage with II, 7.



wisdom? This would hardly be correct; for, whereas he does not mention moderation and wisdom at all when praising the Spartans, he has many things to say of their piety, i. e. of their sacrifices and oracles and hymns.<sup>1</sup> He deals most fully with Spartan piety when recounting how they start their military expeditions. He concludes that account, which is almost completely devoted to the various sacrifices offered up by the king at the beginning of a campaign, by saying: "When you see these things, you would believe that the others are bunglers in military matters and that the Lacedaemonians alone are truly experts in warlike matters."<sup>2</sup> Worship of the gods, which plays no role in education, is an essential part of the art of war. In Xenophon's view of the dignity of war as compared with the dignity of peace and leisure and education, his judgment on piety is implied.

In the time of Xenophon, impiety constituted a criminal offence. Thus philosophy, which is essentially incompatible with acceptance of the gods of the city, was as such subject to persecution.<sup>3</sup> Philosophers had therefore to conceal if not the fact that they were philosophers, at least the fact that they were unbelievers. On the other hand, they desired to communicate their views to a small number of people who were able and willing to accept these views; and since they could not possibly talk to the larger part of that small number because the larger part was not yet born, they had no choice but to write books and publish them. The difficulty implied in the contradiction between the necessarily secret character of the philosophic teaching and the necessarily public character of publications was overcome by a literary technique which made it possible to reveal the truth to a small, if competent, minority, while hiding it from the large majority. That technique was the outcome of a very simple discovery. If a man tells a charming story, most people will enjoy the story—the imitated characters, the imitated actions or events, the imitated landscape, the

<sup>1</sup> For Xenophon's view of piety, see especially *Memorabilia*, IV, 6, 4, and *Agesilaus*, 11, 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> XIII, 5. Cf. also IV, 5-6 and XIII end.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Memorabilia*, I, 2, 31 with Plato, *Apology*, 23 d 4-7.

imitated speeches of the characters, and even the imitation itself—but only a minority of readers will recover from the charm, reflect upon the story and discover the teaching which it silently conveys. Silent or secret teaching is then certainly possible. That it is an actual fact of the past is shown, above all, by the stories and histories of Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon, as well as by the Socratic writings of Xenophon and Plato. One may add that this kind of literature disappeared only at a rather recent date: its disappearance was simultaneous with the disappearance of persecution, just as its reappearance is simultaneous with the reappearance of persecution.

It would, however, betray too low a view of the philosophic writers of the past if one assumed that they concealed their thoughts merely for fear of persecution or of violent death. They concealed the truth from the vulgar also because they considered the vulgar to be unfit to digest the truth: the large majority of men, the philosophers of the past thought, would be deprived of the very basis of their morality if they were to lose their beliefs. They considered it then not only a matter of fear and safety, but also a matter of duty to hide the truth from the majority of mankind. By making the discovered truth almost as inaccessible as it was before it had been discovered, they prevented—to call a vulgar thing by a vulgar name—the cheap sale of the formulations of the truth: nobody should know even the formulations of the truth who had not rediscovered the truth by his own exertions, if aided by subtle suggestions from a superior teacher. It is in this way that the classical authors became the most efficient teachers of independent thinking. It should, however, not be overlooked that this exoteric literature, which provides the highest type of education, is found not only in classical times; it has reappeared in all epochs in which philosophy was understood in its full and challenging meaning, in all epochs, that is, in which wisdom was not separated from moderation. Its disappearance almost coincides with the victory of higher criticism and of systems of philosophy which claimed to be sincere but which certainly lacked moderation.

One cannot study Xenophon, who seems to have been one of the greatest classical admirers of Sparta, without being constantly reminded of that greatest of all modern admirers of Sparta, Jean Jacques Rousseau. If it is true, as is sometimes asserted, that the restitution of a sound approach is bound up with the elimination of Rousseau's influence, then the thesis of the present article can be summed up by saying that the teaching of men like Xenophon is precisely the antidote which we need. It goes without saying that it is not the intention of the present article to refute, or to prove, such a far-reaching thesis. It will, however, not have been written in vain if it induces some readers to reconsider the traditional and current view of Xenophon, which, while being understandable and even to a certain extent justifiable, is almost an insult to this truly royal soul. For such a man was he that he preferred to go through the centuries in the disguise of a beggar rather than to sell the precious secrets of Socrates' quiet and sober wisdom to a multitude which let him escape to immortality only after he had intoxicated it by his artful stories of the swift and dazzling actions of an Agesilaus or a Cyrus, or a Xenophon.

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